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# The Children of Japan

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When one arrives in Japan there are few things that at first attract and interest more than the little children, and it is hard to say whether this is due to their quaint dainty little forms, their sunny countenances, or their bright costumes. No doubt these three characteristics combine to make them, perhaps, the most fascinating little creatures to look upon in all the world.

A GROUP OF CHILDREN

Yet there are varieties among the small inhabitants of "The Sunrise Kingdom," and degrees of attractiveness. Not all are as winning and pleasing as those of the middle and upper classes. In different places the children differ, and the peasant children are not at all attractive in appearance. They usually have very dirty faces and unsightly sores on their heads. The cause of the sores is attributed to their food, for there is no distinction made between the diet of the adult and the child from the time the milk diet of babyhood is given up. But just as frequently the cause is contagion, for no effort is made to cure or prevent the spreading.

There is a certain ceremony upon the first day of a child's life. Then another ceremony upon the seventh night, when the infant receives a name and is really dressed for the first time. A boy's left sleeve must go on first and a girl's right. Girls often receive the names of flowers or trees.

Mothers devote themselves asiduously to their children and one of the things which they pay most particular attention to in their training is courtesy. Not only are children taught to be gentle and courteous to everyone, but older people treat the children with the same courtesy and gentleness that is expected from the children. Self-restraint is a virtue that is inculcated in every Japanese, es-

pecially the most cultured, and this quality parents endeavor to impress upon their children from their earliest years.

When the meal is over each child rises and says "go-chiso sama," "an honorable feast," and when they are going out of the room or the house they say "sayonara"—"good bye."

Mothers and nursemaids carry babies and very small children strapped upon their backs and often several women are seen chatting, with babies in this position, and each one is swaying to and fro to soothe the child. A very usual sight is the small brother or more frequently the sister, playing games or walking about with the baby of the family strapped on. It is wonderful how a baby will sleep on an older brother's or sister's back while the latter go on with play. Japanese children are gentle in their movements but they hop around a great deal and run all over the streets. Fortunately, in most of the towns and villages, there are few horses or other animals, and only in the large cities are there any motor vehicles, and the kindly kurumaya, — "ricksha man" — always looks out for the boys and girls playing in the street. There are no sidewalks and the whole street is a playground.

The people in Japan who know nothing of Jesus Christ believe in a god named *Jizo,* as the special god of little children. This god is represented sitting,

and always has a quantity of little stones piled in his lap. They have been placed there by mothers who have been bereaved of their little ones. It is believed that dead children wander about, hunting their parents, and that they pile up pebbles for prayers in the bed of the River of Souls. Wicked demons scare the children, and knock down their little mounds of stones, but *Jizo* comes to com-

JIZO

fort them. How strange that the name of this god should sound so much like the name of Jesus, who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God."

Old and young in Japan together enjoy the different festivals of the year, especially the fete of the *Sakura,* or cherry blossom. Parents and teachers accompany the young people to the parks, when these trees are in the perfection of their cloudlike beauty, and there admire and enjoy. The parks, at this season are a vivid scene of gaiety. The children have donned their gayest *obi;* temporary booths have been erected, in which are sold an innumerable variety of small toys, and soon each one is dangling or displaying some gay article; and sprays of artificial cherry flowers are purchased to carry home. The band plays and flags wave, while old and young sit upon the ground and partake of fancy cakes made of rice or bean paste, formed in the shape of flowers and correspondingly tinted.

The children have two special yearly holidays; one for the girls on the third day of the third month, and one for the boys on the fifth day of the fifth month. The girls' day is called the Feast of Dolls. Each family has a set of dolls, handed down from one generation to another; complete sets comprise the Em-

peror and Empress, gorgeously apparelled, court ladies and retainers, and a band of musicians. These sit above, while dolls of less importance sit below, on a row of shelves made expressly for the purpose of displaying the dolls on this annual occasion. At all other times these treasures are kept carefully packed away. All sorts of tiny utensils and miniature ornaments of lacquer and porcelain are also in the collection. For this fete the little girls dress in their best, receive guests and make visits, admiring the treasures of each other's household, and having a merry time.

On the festival day for boys flags and toy swords are in evidence, and in the *takonoma,* or "picture alcove," a *kakemona* is hung, representing some favorite hero or valorous deed. But the chief way of celebrating this occasion is by suspending, on a great pole before the door of the house, large painted paper fish. These are hollow and become inflated as they are blown by the wind. Parents and friends present the boys with fish, and they have a pole put up for each son of the household. Sometimes these fish are ten or more, even twenty feet, long. The fish represented is the carp, which can swim up stream. The spirit which the parents wish to implant in their boys is that of bravery and perseverance. Japanese history goes to prove

that in this respect the parents have taught wisely and well. And these brave little boys can be won to be true soldiers of Christ.

Kite flying is also a sport that is very much enjoyed by Japanese boys on windy days. The seventh day of the seventh

TWO WAYS OF BABY TRAVEL

month is another festival that interests the children. Then the young people write something on a bit of fancy paper and tie it to a bamboo branch; for several days this is fastened on the housetop, or somewhere in the garden, then it is taken down and cast into a nearby river, whence, they say, it will float to heaven, and a goddess will get it and read it. If the goddess is pleased she will reward the writer with skillfulness in penmanship, Japanese writing requires skill and accuracy, and children are ambitious to do it beautifully.

What dear, interesting little souls they are! These young people of Japan! And how many of them are fast coming to the time when they will say to the people of the Occident, "Tell us something of your knowledge, we want to hear about your religion." Are we preparing to "give to those that ask of us" generously and adequately?

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